

The Voice of God Amidst the Babble

First a Word to the Sinner

It's a confusing time. If a person wants to "leave Egypt," that is, to come out of his (her) sinful practices and serve God, where does he turn? There is this guy on TV telling him to go this way, and there is that guy on radio telling him something different. There are thousands of books and even blogs like this beckoning the sinner to go whichever way the writer or speaker says is right. If the repentant sinner wants to straighten up his life, what should he do? This is serious stuff.

This is not the time or place to get into a long dissertation on the subject. I have only a few words to say at this point.

Forget the babble of voices and pray to God – whom you may not know in the slightest – and tell Him that you are truly sorry for your sins and want to turn to Him and live only for Him. Tell Him in your own way and mean every single word. If you are sincere, God will forgive you.

Now get a Bible and begin reading it every day. You may not understand it at first, but if you are gut-serious, God will begin to shed light on what you are reading.

At the same time look for a church that believes in the truth of the Bible and in baptism in Jesus' name. You are saved by your heartfelt belief in God (Rom. 3.28), but baptism is another step along this holy way. Try to find a church that is not looking only to see how much money you can bring them. Money is just a temporary need; your soul will live forever – in heaven or in hell. Salvation cannot be bought. If you give God your heart, you will, as a matter of course, give Him whatever else He requires of you.

(The rest of the text is directed to those who already believe in Jesus, but they are confused about what voice to listen to.)

Cling to the Basics, Discard the Untenable

“Times, they are a-changin’!”

If I recall correctly, the foregoing is a quote attributed to an elderly person who had just been brought face-to-face with some new wrinkle in today's technology. Perhaps it was the never-ceasing wonder of the computer, a marvel of electronics that makes at least one or two giant strides forward every year. The latest model of PC ingenuity today will have become obsolescent within a twelve-month period.

It can be likened to the believer's theology – except for one very large difference. The difference is that true theology (literally, the study of God) can no more change than God can. We all know that God declared, "For I am the Lord, I change not..." (Mal. 3.6)

Theology does not change; our perception of what is true theology does change, inevitably, over the months and years. If we were perfect in knowledge and understanding, we would not have to shift in our thinking, but, as we learn more of God and understand Him more fully, we have to make minor shifts in our theology to accommodate the newly acquired learning, if it is scripturally correct.

There are a goodly number of beliefs basic to our faith that will never undergo change – not while the world stands and beyond that. They are truths that have been assailed again and again with more or less plausibility each time, but without the least chance of proving them false. There is no denying their veracity. Here is a list of some of the beliefs that we will never discard:

- Jesus was born of a virgin
- Jesus lived a sinless life
- Jesus suffered cruelly and died grotesquely for our sins
- Jesus arose from the dead
- There is salvation in no other name than Jesus

These tenets of faith have been challenged by critics many times since Jesus walked the earth and they will be challenged many more times before He comes again for His Church. There

are many more unchanging data to add to the list and they are all based on fact and riveted in truth. Without such fundamental beliefs our salvation would collapse upon itself; it would implode to nothingness and we would forever die.

But there are also some beliefs we have held, as individuals or groups of believers, that are no longer tenable in the light of God's continuing illumination on His Word. He continually leads us into all truth.

“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth...” (John 16.13a)

This does not mean that we now have all truth; it indicates only that the increased knowledge God gives us is all truth and not a lie. There is more truth out there for us to learn, but what He has taught us up to now is all truth.

Discerning the Voices

There are all sorts of voices filling the air. There is a literal babble of sounds, confusing sounds, telling us how to act, how to speak, how to be. They urge us to do all sorts of things and they bring all kinds of messages to us. Let's first consider two examples of good voices from the pages of the Bible. The Apostle Paul's voice or message was directed primarily to the Gentile while Peter's was to the Jew. Paul did bring the Gospel to the Jews first wherever he went, but then he directed his efforts towards the Gentiles. Peter, in his travels, did reach out to the Gentiles, but that was not where his main ministry lay. He was an apostle to the Jews.

These two voices spoke differently but to the same objective: the proclaiming of the Gospel. We have a somewhat similar situation today. It is similar but not exactly the same as that of Paul and Peter. Now we have 1) evangelists who speak mainly to the unsaved, although they do speak at times to those who are saved; and 2) we have pastors the main thrust of whose messages is to perfect the sheep of their flock. But they also warn unbelievers of continuing in their sins and present the Gospel to them as a means of deliverance. Looking more closely

at the present-day setup, we see that there are preachers and teachers and then there are those who are neither but who occasionally speak under the anointing of God. Along with preachers and teachers, these persons who speak occasionally under the anointing are modern-day prophets at the precise times they deliver their divinely inspired word. Furthermore, although they are not preachers called to that particular full-time ministry, whenever God chooses to do so, they can be preachers for the moment. God can do as He pleases, and if we are willing, we can be the tools He uses to perform His good pleasure.

We have to be careful in differentiating among the voices we hear. Voices purporting to speak for God are filling the air, the airwaves and the Internet. So before we go further, let's first discard all the outright pretenders flapping around us like vultures waiting to feast on our carcasses. You know who they are, the speakers who have not heard from God and are doing their own thing for prestige and/or profit. That leaves a handful of sincere voices or messengers who speak for God, but even among them the messages vary in content and style and immediate, if not overall, objectives.

Is there confusion then among these preachers, teachers, prophets and even lay witnesses simply because they do not speak alike? Are they working at cross-purposes? They can't be if the Spirit leads them because God is never a God of confusion. Confusion is caused when men and women follow their own paths and adhere to their own schedules. The voice that brings a word of exhortation to the saint and the voice that brings the Good News of salvation to the unsaved are each bringing an element of the same message; they are both part of the unified message of God to mankind.

The teacher teaches; the preacher preaches, the witness witnesses, but they belong to the same team, God's team of men and women who speak forth the truth of God. One exhorts and admonishes; another, in a classroom setting, gives information about the word and will of God, and yet another shows the way of salvation and entreats. These are not a babble of voices speaking to contradictory ends nor are they merely a jumble of

sounds signifying nothing. **They all bring the Word of God to those who will listen.** That is the key: those who will listen.

Now what does this mean to you? Simply this: If these divergent voices are really speaking the Word of God, it would be well for you to listen. Of course, some words are not directed at you. If you are saved, the word brought to the unsaved has already been applied in your life. But even in such a message so often there is a word spoken to the saved person if he or she will only listen diligently. It is seldom that God speaks an extended message such as a sermon only to the unsaved. Conversely, the sermon aimed at those who are saved always has something in it, directly or indirectly, pleading with or warning those who are unsaved.

What are you hearing and, also, **what are you saying?** Are you hearing the word of prophecy, the anointed word that comes from any one of a number of messengers? Paul has admonished us, "Despise not prophesyings" (1 Th 5:20 KJV). Why? The reason is powerful: prophecy is the Word of God. At the same time, are you speaking what God gives YOU to say? If God has given you a prophetic (not necessarily predictive) message to bring to His people or to speak to the unsaved, you need to be obedient and thrust your voice in with the myriad of voices around you. Your voice may be relatively weak and timorous, but someone will hear you. God's word will not return to Him void.

I scarcely need to remind you that any message purporting to come from God will not contradict His written word, nor will it speak at cross purposes with what your pastor is saying. That, of course, is assuming that the pastor is a voice speaking for God. I must remind you: God is not a God of confusion; He doesn't get His wires crossed. If there are any crossed wires, a human is always at fault. Be sure you are in His will, whatever you do or say.

There are three things I wish for you, as well as for myself: 1) I pray that you will seek God-given discernment so that you might heed the right voices because you are going to listen to

someone, if only to your own off-key voice; 2) be sure to follow the divinely inspired advice they give. There are voices that have the right words for you, just when you need them. Stay attuned to God so that you may be attuned to the right voice at the right time; and 3) add your own God-inspired verbal input to the welter of sound all around. God will enable the right “channel surfer” to pick your sound out of the static and confusion filling the air and the Internet. There are intelligent, spiritual voices out there. Perhaps yours should be one of them.

Voices, voices, voices. What can we do about them? We can't afford to shut them out completely; that would be the same as becoming a hermit. That's not the way God wants us to live. And we dare not silence our own God-inspired voice. There are times when it is best to take a break from gobbling in all your voracious mind can absorb and start giving or speaking what God wants you to speak. People need you, whether it be a vast congregation or a single soul thirsty to drink in the water of life you bring to his parched lips. The needy soul may be a saint or a sinner. Get very close to God so that He might lead you into the right situations in which He wants you to preach a sermon to a congregation, teach a lesson to a few listeners or give a soothing, comforting word to one who is in desperate need of it.

To paraphrase Paul's words to Timothy,

"If a man therefore purge himself from these [voices], he shall be a [voice] unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use . . ." 2 Tim 2:21.

- Aaron J. Smith

